

and do schoolwork between these two practices. I talked to my parents and my coaches about it...they were all okay with that. They supported me."

If he was going to play in America, he needed some exposure. He found his answer in Germany, of all places.

"After I decided to come to the States, I had a tournament in Germany. This is the shirt from the tournament in Germany," said Balbay, indicating the Albert-Schweitzer Basketball Tournament shirt he was wearing.

Albert-Schweitzer is the largest privately organized tournament for junior national teams in the world, essentially a junior World Cup. It occurs every two years and scouts from colleges and the pros make their way to Germany each time the event is held.

"All the NBA scouts, college coaches, even Joe Dumars was there. So it's a really important tournament," said Balbay. "I knew it was going to be really important for me to show myself to the scouts and college coaches."

He showed himself, alright. Balbay went off, leading his team in scoring (13.7 points per game), assists (6.1 assists per game), rebounding (6 rebounds per game) and steals (3.6 steals per game) while posting a 43-to-14 assist-to-turnover margin over the seven games of the tournament in Mannheim. Turkey finished second in the event and Balbay was named "top point guard."

One scout who took notice of Balbay was Dave Babcock, the player personnel director for the Milwaukee Bucks. Babcock was impressed with Balbay's skills and sought out the talented point guard. Balbay, of course, was still far too young for the NBA, but he expressed interest to Babcock in playing college basketball in the United States.

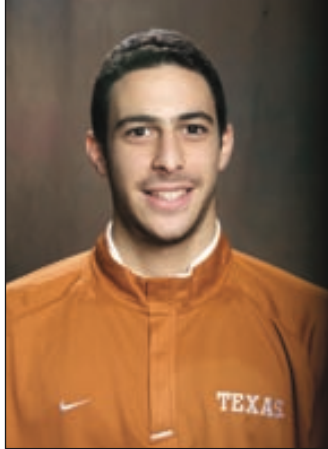
Babcock had just the place for Balbay. It turns out the NBA exec is close friends with a college basketball coach named Rick Barnes. Babcock sent Barnes a breakdown of Balbay, recommending Texas pursue the talented point guard.

Barnes e-mailed Balbay and the recruitment began. As Balbay read about Texas, he became more and more intrigued with each aspect of the school, from the degree programs to the Turkish community that lives in Austin.

It was a long trip, but in August of 2006, Balbay and his family flew from Istanbul to Austin and he made his visit. It was the only trip he'd need to take.

"I didn't want to visit any other schools. I said, 'Yes, that's what I want,'" said Balbay.

He gave his commitment to Barnes and was ready to play basketball in the United States... there was just one problem. Balbay couldn't speak English. If he couldn't speak English, he couldn't pass the TOEFL test (Test Of English as a Foreign Language) and if he couldn't pass the TOEFL test, he couldn't go to college. He needed to go somewhere he could play basketball and learn English. The solution came in the form of Brewster Academy, a private boarding school in Wolfeboro, New Hampshire.



Texas Sports Photography

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**– Dogus Balbay**

Balbay would play for Brewster Academy while learning English both in and out of the classroom. In the classroom, it was essentially all ESL classes.

"I took three or four ESL, English as a Second Language, classes," said Balbay. "I took an ESL calculus and American History. It was an ESL class, easy American History. I started learning English."

Out of the classroom, he learned through total immersion. He lived in a dorm at the school and was around his teammates 24 hours a day, allowing him to pick up conversational English.

It was quite a culture shock, but Balbay said he enjoyed learning about and engaging in American culture and customs, of which he knew very little when he left Istanbul. One of the more difficult transitions was actually on the basketball court. The European game with which Balbay was familiar was very different from basketball played in the states.

"American basketball is more about individuals and one-on-one," said Balbay. "You never know what they're going to do. In high school you don't have that many plays and sets on offense. Players can do whatever they want. In Turkey it wasn't like that. We had a lot of plays and sets."

Balbay told *IT* it was good for him to learn the American game at a high school instead of coming straight to Texas because it allowed him to get a feel for the intricacies of the way players move, which is of absolute importance to a point guard.

It didn't take him long. Passing and setting up his teammates is what Balbay focused on and he had a strong year with Brewster, averaging 7.5 assists per game to go with his 13.5 points while leading Brewster to a 29-6 record.

His game was ready for Texas, as was his English. Balbay passed the TOEFL and in May of 2007 signed his letter of intent to play for UT.

Balbay said going to college in Austin wasn't difficult because of how much more knowledgeable he'd become about American culture. He's been open to learning all he can about America and he's been impressed with how open people have been to him. His skin color, his origins and his family's religion have not been issues at all.

Balbay is Muslim, but he said he's never received any ill will because of it and has enjoyed the learning experience he's had about others.

"Most people in Turkey are Muslim, so I didn't know much about other religions, but when I came to the States, I realized people have different religions, but it's not a big deal having a different religion in the States. Everybody has an open mind. Everybody accepts what your religion is, so being a Muslim is not a problem, or being a Christian," said Balbay.

He's formed close friendships with each of his Texas teammates and the cultural differences have not been an issue. In fact, the only problem he's faced as a Muslim when it comes to basketball is the holy month of Ramadan.

The most prominent feature of Ramadan is fasting, where a Muslim does not eat anything from sunup to sundown. The problem is that over the last few years, Ramadan has been occurring right at the start of basketball season (it adjusts based on the lunar calendar) and it's hard to play when you haven't eaten anything during the daylight hours for a month.

"I tried a couple times, but during the practice you can't think very well, you don't have the energy to go faster. It's hard," said Balbay.

Because he plays basketball, Balbay doesn't typically